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THOUGHTS ON ENGLISH UNIVERSITIES.

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I SPOKE in a former article* of the origin and growth of the English universities, and of the special feature which distinguishes them from the universities of other countries, namely, the existence of many colleges in one university. I will now speak of the changes which have taken place in the universities and their colleges during the last forty years. I speak mainly of Oxford, but many remarks will apply to Cambridge also. These changes fall under three main heads :

First, Changes in the constitution of the university itself and of its colleges.

Second, Changes in the relation of the university to the nation at large.

Third, Changes in the studies of the university.

Now, changes in the university have caused changes in the colleges, and the existence of the colleges has affected the course of change in the university. Some have been made directly by act of Parliament or by commissioners empowered by Parliament. Some have been made by formal acts of the university or of the several colleges. And some have come of themselves.

I explained before, how, by the original constitution of both universities, the supreme authority rested in a general assembly, convocation or senate, of all who had taken the highest degree in any faculty, that is, of every doctor and master who had kept his name on the books. But at Oxford the democratic character of this constitution had been broken down by the rule that

* THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, July, 1851.

nothing could be proposed to convocation which had not been approved by a body called the hebdomadal board ; that is, the vice-chancellor, the two proctors, and the heads of colleges and halls. Convocation could only say yea and nay to their proposals, no amendment could be made, and all debate was in Latin. Here was the greatest encroachment made by the colleges on the university ; for in the university constitution heads of colleges had no privilege over other doctors or masters. It was further objected that neither the hebdomadal board nor the convocation itself really represented the university. The heads, as being, except a few professors and canons, almost the only married men in the university, lived much among themselves, and knew little of what other people thought and felt. Convocation, meanwhile, largely consisted of non-residents. A measure of no great general interest was left to the resident members ; but any exciting question, above all any theological question, drew up hundreds of men from all parts. It was said that many non-resident members of convocation were unfit to judge of university affairs, and that their votes often swamped those of the resident members. In truth the votes of many non-resident members were better worth having than the votes of many residents. But the lowering of the standard for degrees, and the giving of the higher degree at random to all who had taken the lower, had greatly lowered the character of convocation. Every doctor and master ought to be fit to judge of university matters, but every doctor and master was not.

Nothing has yet been done to remedy this last evil ; but the constitution of the university has been improved in other ways. This was done by act of Parliament in 1854. The powers and constitution of convocation were left as they were ; but the body that was to propose measures to it was changed. The new body, called the hebdomadal council, is mainly elective. Besides the chancellor, vice-chancellor, and proctors, eighteen members are chosen, six heads of houses, six professors or readers, while six may be members of convocation of any kind. These are chosen by a body called congregation, consisting of all resident or official members of convocation. And all statutes are first proposed by the council to congregation, which can not only accept or reject, but can make amendments and debate in English. When a statute has passed congregation, convocation still says

yea or nay. The act meant to give the old congregation a new constitution and new power ; but the lawyers said that the words used left the old congregation as it was, and set up a new congregation beside it in Oxford. So there are now two bodies called congregation, with different constitutions and different duties.

Much greater freedom of action is gained for the university in this change. The constitution of the council was doubtless meant to let the head down easily and to lift the professors up easily. After more than thirty years, the distinction is perhaps needless, and both heads and professors might be left to find their level. If any limitation is needed, a representation of faculties would be better. And the number of the council should be either larger or smaller. Nothing can be really debated in it, for the number is too large for conversation and too small for set speeches.

In another case the encroachments of the colleges on the university have been got rid of by abolishing the statute which required every member of the university to become a member of some college or hall. Men may now come, and do come in considerable numbers, who are members of the university only and not members of any college. For all university purposes they are on the same level as other members of the university ; they simply use the advantages of a college life. And it is, of course, open to non-collegiate members of the university to obtain scholarships and fellowships in the colleges.

The colleges themselves have also been greatly changed, how far for the better is largely matter of opinion. Much will depend on the view which any man takes of the nature and duty of a college and of its relations to the university. It must be remembered that a college is in its origin simply a foundation to provide a dwelling and maintenance for certain students in the university. It is a *foundation*, not an *institution*. In making a foundation there was nothing unreasonable if the founder, in dispensing his bounty, gave a preference to those who came from some county or school in which he took a special interest. In a teaching institution restrictions of this kind must work badly. An inferior man might often be chosen when a better man might be had. Changes in the colleges have heretofore taken the direction of getting rid of restrictions and preferences of all kinds. Fellowships and scholarships have been thrown open ; scholars have lost their claim or preference to fellowships. The

number of fellowships has been greatly lessened. The nature and position of fellowships have also been greatly changed. They have ceased to be held for life. They are held for a term of years, or they have duties in college attached to them, or they are attached to offices in the university, as professorships. And in most cases marriage is allowed. Most of these changes would be undoubted improvements in a teaching college which stood by itself and not alongside of other colleges in an university.

Formerly a man was, first of all, a fellow of his college, a member of its foundation ; he might or might not take on him the duties of a tutor. Now a man is made tutor, and he receives a fellowship as part payment of his work as tutor. And as married fellows cannot live in college, the tutor stands in a less close relation to his pupils than he used to stand. Scholarships, again, originally meant for students who could not come to the university without help, have sunk into rare prizes, given as rewards for cleverness in an examination, whether those who receive them have any need of them or not ; or, rather, they are likely to be got by lads who have been specially prepared at expensive schools, while those for whom scholarships were meant have to come to the university how they can,—perhaps as non-collegiate students. In Oxford, as elsewhere, educational reform has largely meant taking from the poor to give to the rich.

In all these ways the colleges have forgotten their nature as *foundations* designed for the maintenance of students in the university, each foundation having something distinctive in its character and objects. They have become teaching institutions, all after the same model and doing the same work. Each strives to get as many under-graduates as it can, and to draw to it the most brilliant under-graduates by the offer of scholarships. The colleges have, in fact, become large boarding-schools, each of which undertakes to do the work of the university. The doubt therefore suggests itself whether the work of the university could not be better done by the university itself than by twenty and more distinct and independent institutions within it.

The second head is the relation of the universities to the nation at large. Here the chief point of change is the divergency of religious distinctions in the university and its colleges. The universities were not in their origin, as many people seem to think, what we should now call clerical institutions ; they

were hardly ecclesiastical institutions. But at a time when the whole nation was of one religion, and when religion was mixed up with every action of life, they naturally grew up under religious influences. At a time when the thought that there could be more religious bodies than one in the nation had not come into any one's head, there was no conscious restriction to one religious body, to the exclusion of others. Divinity was naturally one of the studies, and among the highest, of the university. But there could be no formal restrictions to the Church of England till there were other religious bodies in the land besides the Church of England. At Oxford every student who matriculated was required to sign the Articles of Religion of the Church of England. The absurdity of making mere lads subscribe thirty-nine propositions in controversial theology need not be dwelled on. At Cambridge the subscription came at a late stage, so that a Non-conformist could be examined and could win honors in his examination, but could not take a degree. All this is now abolished. Everything, every degree and office, in both universities is open without distinction, except that degrees in divinity can be taken only by clergymen of the Church of England. And all university terms and other services are according to the use of the Church of England. This could hardly be otherwise, so long as a national church is acknowledged at all. But no one is bound to attend such services or is forbidden to attend any other.

The colleges, in their original foundation, were particularly more ecclesiastical than the university. They are in law lay corporations, and it may be well to remind every one once more that at no time was there anything monastic about them. But in foundations which were meant to be communities,—artificial families,—the religious element (in the modern sense of the word) was necessarily strong. The college chapel comes more home to men than the university church. In the minds of founders religion and learning always went together. But the strictly clerical element varied in different colleges; in some the fellows had to take holy orders sooner or later; in others they might all be laymen. At present there is no restriction on admission to the colleges and their foundations. Non-conformists and Jews have held scholarships and fellowships. Of clerical fellowships only a few are left to supply chaplains and theological teachers. Only two of the heads are under any restriction. The Rector of Lin-

coln College is necessarily a clergyman. And at Christ Church, a very strong foundation, a body of students were attached to the cathedral chapel of the diocese. They were, therefore, under the sole management of the dean and canons. The governing body now consists of the dean and canons together with the students—answering nearly to the fellows of other colleges—on whom there is no restriction. There is also the new foundation of Hertford College, a rich college, and also the large hall called Keble College, both which have been founded strictly as Church of England institutions. It is equally possible to found Non-conformist halls or colleges. But it should be understood that Mansfield College and Manchester New College, Non-conformist institutions in Oxford, are not colleges in the old sense and have no connection with the University. But there is nothing whatever to hinder them from becoming halls or colleges.

Under the head of the relations of the universities to the nation at large might further come several schemes by which the universities send out examiners and lecturers to various places. The sending of lecturers, which must be good or bad accordingly as their lectures are good or bad, is called university extension, which has nothing to do with the constitution of the universities.

Our third subject is those studies themselves. In the old theory there was, besides arts, the three superior faculties of divinity, law, and medicine, to which none but graduates in arts were admitted. It is hard to define arts. We might say that it takes in whatever subjects are at any time held to be essential to a general, liberal education, as distinguished from the strictly professional faculties. What these subjects are will differ according to the ideas of different ages. The essential thing in any age is that they should be subjects which are good for every man; good for the general culture of the mind, without any reference to a man's special calling. An university is a place at once of special learning and of general training of the mind; it is assuredly not a place for each man to come to and there learn his own calling. The course for the first degree at all events should be preliminary, good for all, desirable first of all for the training of the mind; only in a secondary way for the sake of the actual knowledge gained in it. The study of special subjects should not come till this first foundation is laid. It follows that the age at which students come to the university should be the earliest at which they are able to

benefit by the preliminary training. The first degree taken, a more special course may follow, at what is still an early time of life, and that should lead to the second, the master's degree.

Something like this was the old theory ; but it was very imperfectly carried out, and it has not been thrown altogether aside. Fifty years back and less, the training given by the universities, the course for the first degree, was mainly what is called "classical" and mathematical. The details differed largely at Oxford and at Cambridge Universities ; at Cambridge mathematics had a greater prominence than they had in Oxford, and the character of "classical" scholarship in the two was exactly the same. Cambridge, we may say, gave more attention to the minute knowledge of the "classical" languages, and Oxford more to the knowledge of the books written in them. The old system, in short, had a very good course as a preliminary course, and nothing could be better than the single searching examination for the bachelor's degree. The unlucky thing was, that it was sometimes forgotten that the course was only a preliminary course. The faults of the system were these :

First, The degradation of the common degree. A high class in the examination was well worth having ; a pass degree, though better than nothing at all, was worth comparatively little.

Second, The absence of any further examination or exercise for the master's degree, which had become a matter of form. Hence many men, because they had got a good class for their bachelor's degree, were tempted to fancy that they already knew all that they needed to know, and became teachers at a stage when they should still have been learners.

Third, Even forty or fifty years back, men were beginning to come to the university later than was good for them, later than they had done at the beginning of the century.

The bill-of-reform needed was clear. For the first point, the standard of the bachelor's degree should have been raised, so as to be in itself respectable, and the wretched excitement of classlists should have been got rid of. And more use should have been made than was made—or than could have been made fifty years back—of the great teachings of modern philology. For the second point, the master's degree should have been made to require real proficiency in some branch of knowledge, the wider the range of subjects the better. The master's degree would then become honor-

able, and no one could any longer say that the general assembly of the university was an incompetent body. Thirdly, every encouragement should have been given to students to come early to the university, in order to have time for both their preliminary and their special course.

Instead of this, change has taken quite opposite directions. A very natural and reasonable cry for the introduction of other subjects into the arts course, besides "classics" and mathematics, has been met in a wrong way. Instead of keeping the old subjects preliminary, and putting the newer subjects into a separate course for the master's degree, a number of new subjects have been made alternative with old ones for the bachelor's degree.

Instead of keeping one preliminary course for all candidates for the bachelor's degree, every attempt has been made in these alternative courses specially to adapt different forms of them to particular classes of men. The crowning absurdity is the establishment of schools in law and theology, subjects which have their distinct faculties in the university, as alternative ways of getting a degree in the faculty of arts. The degree, the class, may now be had in endless different ways, so that it is impossible to know what each man's degree, or class, means. The one searching examination, which was a real test of real work, is exchanged for endless petty examinations in this and that, one after another, so that everybody seems to be always either examining or being examined, without any time for study, reading, or thought being left for either teacher or learner. For the master's degree nothing has been done; it is still given without distinction to all who can anyhow get the bachelor's degree. By all this, the temptation to men to fancy that they have learned everything, and to become teachers before their time has been strengthened. The notion of teaching and learning, without reference to examinations, is driven out of men's heads.

Again, the excessive attention to those subjects only which tell in examinations has done much to hinder the usefulness of the professors. Their business, as distinguished from that of the college rector, clearly is to teach those subjects which are not required for examination and the higher branches of those which are. Those who love learning for its own sake are always a minority, and with that minority the professors have to put up. The educational power at Oxford now lies mainly, neither with

professors nor with colleges after the old pattern, nor yet with doctors and masters lecturing as such, according to a still older pattern. That is to say, a teacher belonging to one college lectures to men of several colleges or of all. If this arrangement is found convenient, it follows that the colleges, as separate teaching institutions, are no longer needed. They are attempting to do the work of the university, which ought to be done by some authority in the university.

Add to this, there are what are called boards of studies in each branch of examination. Of these the professors are *ex officio* members ; but with these are joined others elected by the body of teachers in that branch. That body is defined to be all who are certified by the heads of their colleges to be teachers in that branch. That is to say, a young man who begins to teach when he ought to be still learning is, on the certificate perhaps of another young man no better qualified than himself, put on a level with the professor who is presumably a master of his subject. In the business done at these boards the professors have no vote or advantage beyond any lecturer of this kind ; the professors have to send in their scheme of lectures for approval to the board then formed, and the lectures of the professors are announced confusedly with the lectures of the other lecturers. From the point of view of the advancement of learning comment seems hardly needed.

The associate class of teachers thus called into being, college officers, if anything, taking on themselves university functions, are mostly hard-working men. Their fault is rather that they work too hard, that they leave no time for themselves or their pupils to read or think. Some of them are really able men, who do good work as far as their position allows. But their position is a wrong one ; they should be either professors or college tutors, not a confusion of the two. It is very remarkable that the best commission arose out of a movement for the advancement of learning as distinguished from examination, and for the recognition of the professors as the representatives of learning. The result has been the bondage and degradation of learning and of its professors. All this strangely suggests the question whether twenty and more independent institutions, as distinguished from their ancient nature as foundations, are not mischievous rather than useful in the university.

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